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MARTHA.

(Continued from page 6.)

she was thinking of that other wedding that was to have been and it made me mad, but I never let on. Her mother cried a lot, too. Out of sympathy, I suppose. Women are queer creatures, anyhow.

"Things didn't go smoothly for us from the first. Martha didn't go ahead with the work like I had been used to seeing mother do. Martha's ma said she wasn't strong enough to do all the work and the washing and that they had never asked her to do much at home, because she had always been small and delicate. Lord! Mother did all the housework for a family of eight and her own washing up to the week before she died, and she wasn't no bigger than Martha. I told Martha's ma that she had better stay to home and let men run my own house.

"Martha lacked energy and ambition. She was always a-worrying, but she never said anything about it. Sometimes when I'd come home to dinner I'd find her sitting with her hands folded in her lap and looking out into space while the potatoes burned in the kettle or the clothes boiled over on the stove. When I'd speak to her she'd give a big jump and her face would turn red and white by turns. A man don't like to have his dinner spoiled, but no amount of talking ever seemed to do her any good.

"We had been married about a year when the other fellow came back. It appears that he hadn't been drowned at all, but had been cast up in some out of the way place where he had been sick for a long time. I heard the news of his arrival up town and I hurried home because I wanted to see how Martha would take it.

When I got home she was lying on the lounge in the sitting room with her head in a sofa-pillow crying fit to kill. I suppose she thought she was safe there, because she wasn't expecting me home for two or three hours. She was talking to herself, too, and going on at a great rate. "Oh, I can't bear it; I can't bear it. Whatever will he think. If I could only tell him that I wasn't to blame; that I was forced into it."

I took her by the arm and jerked her up. "Get up from there, and quit your sniffing," I said. I said a good deal more, too, that's not worth repeating, but I guess I scared her pretty thoroughly. Anyway, she didn't cry any more, but shut her lips in a straight line and went about her work.

"The fellow was terribly cut up, folks said. He took to drinking and horse-racing and left town a few months later for where, nobody knows. Things went on worse than ever after that between Martha and I. The only thing that she seemed to care anything about was our boy. Her folks had gone to live in Alabama and since they left she had taken to staying pretty much at home, not talking much to anybody but the boy.

"It was over the boy that we had our final falling out. Martha had spoiled him terribly. I used to remonstrate with her but she kept on spoiling him just the same. He got to be a big child of four or five, but he wasn't like other boys. He was quiet and shy and always hung around his mother. So I determined to make a man of him. I began taking him with me when I went places where I could take him.

"He was not fond of riding horse-back and his mother objected to me taking him on before me when I rode. I remember that last day particularly. My horse was young and skittish and Martha made a big fuss about my taking the boy and when we rode down the road she stood at the gate, shading her eyes with her hand, and looking after us.

"I never knew just what happened. The horse shied and plunged to one side of the road and I lost my hold on the boy. The horse's hoofs must have struck him. Anyway the doctor said his skull was fractured.

"I felt pretty bad about it, too, and I didn't like the way Martha took it. She didn't cry. She just looked terribly calm and white. She didn't say anything until the day after the boy was buried. When I came home at noon there was a small trunk standing on the front porch. Martha met me at the door. She had her cloak and bonnet on.

"She held her head erect and looked at me as I had never seen her look before. "I am going home," she said.

"I can not live with you any longer. You killed my son and I despise you." "That was the last I heard of her until just last week, when I got word she was —"

"Lincoln! Lincoln!"

The man roared hurriedly and took the bundles from the rack overhead. "I am glad to have met you," he said.

The little woman did not notice the out-stretched hand, nor did she utter a word until the man was well out of the ear. Then she took a neatly folded handkerchief from the bosom of her dress and wiped here eyes, exclaiming aloud, with a strange jumbling of ideas, "The brute! Poor thing! And to think I wasted a whole chicken and those crullers on him."

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